Impacting Communities Through the Arts

12 Case Studies of Arts Engagement in Singapore

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Foreword

The National Arts Council's mission is to make the arts an integral part of our lives. According to the 2017 National Population Survey on the Arts, one in two Singaporeans attended arts events and nearly one in four participated in arts activities. Nine in 10 Singaporeans concurred that arts and culture offer a better understanding of people from different backgrounds and cultures. We believe that the arts cultivates a sense of identity, serves as a channel for creative expression, and connects people across the social aisle.

One of the National Arts Council's strategic outcomes is to connect communities, bringing people together to enjoy and support the arts. This means going beyond theatres, concert halls and galleries, into homes and communities where Singaporeans live, work and play. We are grateful to partner agencies and community organisations for offering their spaces and resources, as well as sponsors and volunteers for enabling a more intimate shared experience for the arts to take root in the community.

Artists play a central role in engaging communities. By co-creating works with community-based interest groups and under-reached communities, artists encourage conversations and appreciation for the arts among participants. Individuals are not merely passive members of the audience; they are active participants contributing to the conversation, shaping the artistic outcome. In the midst of such art-making collaborations, common interests are reinforced and bridges are built. Together, they dig deep into the well of collective memories and experiences, and find meaningful ways to express their reflections through music, dance, theatre, visual and literary arts. There is excellence in such practices which we need to celebrate, document and share with the rest of Singapore and beyond.

It also bears reminding that what starts as broad-based arts exposure and enjoyment for the community has the potential to attract new long-term arts lovers and deepen their appreciation for the arts.

This publication is the National Arts Council's first documentation of various approaches to community arts in Singapore. We hope these 12 case studies encapsulate best practices in community arts and spread the idea of situating art-making in the community among artists, community groups, place-owners and policy makers alike, so that more Singaporeans may be enriched by the arts.

Rosa Daniel
CEO
National Arts Council

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Strengthening Communities

Strengthening Communities

The arts can be a meaningful way to bring different groups of people together and build them up. These include bridging intergenerational relationships, enhancing physical and mental well-being, fostering inclusion and resilience and creating platforms to explore socially relevant topics. Broadly, communities can encompass seniors within a care institution, socially marginalised groups and even loosely gathered individuals and families.

10 x 10

Bonding Different Generations Through the Art of Writing

2012 | By Ceriph

Erny Melissa looks on as Chee Kit Loy recites a draft of his work. The duo was one of 10 senior and youth pairings involved in an intimate process of sharing and creative writing.

OVERVIEW

About the Project
An intergenerational creative writing programme where seniors and youths were introduced to different literary forms. They then worked together to co-create poems and essays based on their personal experiences.

Project Aims
- Demonstrate the potential of creative writing
- Create meaningful opportunities for different generations to interact with one another

Participants
Seniors and Youths

Types of Art
Literary Arts

Haikus, poetry and essays—normally the ambit of English literature classrooms—became the means that brought ten seniors and ten youths together. Through a series of writing workshops, the two groups learnt about one another as participants of *10 x 10*, an intergenerational English literary project organised by literary publication *Ceriph*.

Over six sessions, the seniors and youths worked in pairs to write, drawing inspiration from each other's life stories. They wrote haikus from words their partners felt best represented themselves. In another exercise, they used personification—a literary device in which human qualities are projected onto inanimate objects—to describe personal items belonging to their partners. These creative exercises facilitated conversations between the two generations which have very different world views and life experiences.

"I simply wanted to bring together different segments of society (youths and seniors) who might not otherwise get to be in contact with one another, via a medium that I think touches us all, one way or another—the act of writing, of telling stories," explained Amanda Lee, the Co-Editor of *Ceriph*.

As many of the participants were new to the literary arts, each session began with presentations by *Ceriph*'s artist-facilitators on a literary technique or concept before the group carried out related exercises. To explore the notion of synaesthesia, a condition affecting the sensory perception of one's surroundings, participants penned down memories based on an assigned colour. They also carried out free-writing after learning about Dadaism, a 20th century avant-garde movement characterised by incongruence.

"10 x 10 really rejuvenates my passion for writing. Here, I feel that people care about what I have to say and my own story.

- SENIOR PARTICIPANT, CHEE KIT LOY

"[The seniors] are all more rock and roll than I am!"

- YOUTH PARTICIPANT, SAMUEL WEE

Ceriph's co-editor, Amanda Lee, facilitated the 10 x 10 project as well as its Mandarin iteration, 白马非马 *(When a White Horse is Not a Horse).*

Youth participant Diana Rahim explains the personal significance of an artefact brought by her partner, Mdm Chor, before working on a writing exercise together.

Ultimately, Amanda's aim was to create a *"no-pressure, nurturing environment"* that helped break the barriers between the youths and seniors. *"I tried to make it feel like a series of experimental workshops exploring memories with guided tools and a partner to refract those experiences,"* she said. As a result, the youths and seniors gained new perspectives about working together. Senior participant Michael Tan said, *"The youths are so spontaneous. Their creative juices flow easily."* Likewise, youth participant Alvin Soh started seeing his collaborators in a different light. *"The seniors were less scary than I had imagined,"* he said.

Amanda added that the literary arts offer a highly accessible entry point into the arts and for the different generations because narrating and writing are intrinsically tied to how humans remember. *"Even if you've never written a story or a poem before, your brain has definitely been involved with 'narrativizing' memory."* Unlike other art forms, writing requires very little resources to start with.

At the end of *10 x 10*, selected writings from each participant were compiled into a publication that was printed and disseminated at libraries and museums. The participants also read their works to an audience at the Singapore Writers Festival 2012.

Beyond having a platform to meet others, senior participant Rita Teo also discovered new forms of writing. *"I've never written a haiku, but it was surprisingly enjoyable and not very difficult. I even tried writing my daily journal in haiku after 10 x 10!"* said the retired caseworker and arts enthusiast.

Youth participant Rocco Hu was surprised by the many stories he heard from the seniors. *"I have come to recognise more fully art's power to connect real people as opposed to being just objects for personal aesthetic satisfaction,"* he said. *"[Working with seniors] made me open my ears a lot more to what they have to say."*

Playwright and artist Aidli Mosbit leading a workshop for the Malay intergenerational writing project, Tua-Tua Kelapa.

BRIDGING GENERATIONS ACROSS LANGUAGES

10 x 10 has inspired intergenerational writing projects in other languages that bring youths and seniors closer together. These projects explored a range of themes ranging from philosophical precepts to reflections on the relationship between self and society.

白马非马 (When A White Horse is Not a Horse) (2013) By *Ceriph*

Nine Chinese-educated senior citizens and nine English-educated youths with a basic grasp of Mandarin were brought together for this workshop inspired by Chinese philosophy. Over five sessions, acclaimed Singapore Chinese writers such as You Jin, Zhou Can and Zhou Decheng introduced participants to concepts such as the Confucian virtue of *ren* (仁), the positivity of a virtuous human experience, and the essence of *wu wei* (无为), the state of doing without doing.

Tua-Tua Kelapa (2014) By Aidli Mosbit

This Malay writing workshop led by Singapore Malay writers Aidli, Naim Daipi, Mohd Khair Mohd Yassin and Isa Kamari inspired six participants to create quatrains (four-line stanzas), lyrics, poems and scripts that deconstructed Malay idioms, questioning their relevance to their lives today.

Muthurrai (Impression) (2015) By Avant Theatre & Language

Through writings in Tamil, six participants explored their struggles and hopes of living in Singapore. This included poems exploring societal issues, short stories recollecting their personal memories and essays reflecting on Singapore's Golden Jubilee that year. The group also penned short plays exploring the dichotomy between self-gratification and selflessness in a modern society.

Both Sides, Now: Living with Dying

Bringing Families Together to Talk About End-of-Life Issues

2013 - present | By Drama Box and ArtsWok Collaborative

For many weeks, the entrance to Khoo Teck Puat Hospital was converted into an immersive space for the public to reflect and to talk about end-of-life issues. Photo courtesy of Both Sides, Now.

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A multi-disciplinary arts experience that creates awareness, encourages reflection and provokes conversations around end-of-life issues among seniors, the wider public, healthcare and community care professionals.

Project Aims

- Create a cultural shift towards the understanding and embracing of mortality
- Develop communities where individuals and families are supported in making informed decisions about end-of-life plans

Participants

Seniors, the wider public, healthcare and community care professionals

Types of Art

Multi-Disciplinary

A father is on life support when his condition turns critical. A cancer-stricken mother refuses treatment and prefers to die at home. Such real-life struggles with death are played out for audiences to discuss at *Both Sides, Now*, an immersive arts experience about end-of-life issues. Organised by Drama Box and ArtsWok Collaborative, this programme allows audiences to encounter the prospect of dying through a range of art forms and works—from the forum theatre piece, *Exit*, to art installations where participants can visually chart their high and low points in life on a board, or even climb into a coffin to listen to conversations about death. Through such a multi-disciplinary arts-based approach, *Both Sides, Now* hopes to open up conversations about this taboo subject and bring families closer as a result.

"If things don't end properly, with a lot of unresolved conflicts, your loved ones are left with that," explained Ngiam Su-Lin, the Co-Founder and Director of ArtsWok Collaborative. *"We plan for the birth of our child but we don't plan for our death. Why is that so? Both are equally important milestones."*

The project started in 2013 when they were commissioned by Lien Foundation and Ang Chin Moh Foundation to explore questions surrounding death with healthcare staff, patients and caregivers at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital. While these groups often discussed death in terms of treatment and causes, *Both Sides, Now* worked with artists to create works that recognise dying as a social and family event in life too.

"In the healthcare setting, you are not given that space to share your stories," said Su-Lin. *"What art does is it opens up multiple spaces within a person, for a much deeper reflection."*

The first edition of *Both Sides, Now* was well-received, drawing some 8,000 visitors. Its success saw the programme extended to the heartlands of Khatib and Toa Payoh in 2014. Over the next

> "I like the exhibition where people can put themselves in the shoes of others and face the issues... Good platform for people to start thinking. There is a real need to start conversations with [the] family."
>
> - PARTICIPANT, *BOTH SIDES, NOW*

Forum theatre performance, Exit, provoked interesting responses from diverse groups of audiences. Photo courtesy of Both Sides, Now.

From 2014, the puppetry show The Wind Came Home has toured 50 senior activity centres, facilitating conversations about end-of-life issues with many seniors. Photo courtesy of Both Sides, Now.

two years, it also visited 50 senior centres across Singapore. In 2017, *Both Sides, Now* started a multi-year engagement in Telok Blangah and Chong Pang to make a more lasting impact. To ensure effectiveness in their outreach, some 100 volunteers are roped in each year as facilitators. In addition, *Both Sides, Now* is also working with partners such as Montfort Care and Yishun Health to develop community capacities to engage in conversations and plan for end-of-life issues.

Kok Heng Leun, the Artistic Director of Drama Box, noted that a key component of the project was encouraging people to listen to one another. While the art installations prompted audiences to reflect on end-of-life issues, the forum theatre performances encouraged conversations. Each play ended with small group discussions as volunteers engaged audiences to share their thoughts over dessert. *"Most of the time, we pretend to hear, but we do not listen. We must listen with our eyes, our ears, our body,"* said Heng Leun. Volunteer Manager Angie Cheong recalled how a post-performance conversation helped a gentleman realise the need to reconsider the scenarios he had prepared in his will. *"He said the show set him thinking about the need to talk about end-of-life choices with his family in the event that he loses his mental capacity,"* she said.

Angie experienced a similar personal revelation when she began volunteering at *Both Sides, Now* in 2014. At a volunteers' briefing session, she was stumped when asked who she would trust with her final wishes. *"That simple question made me evaluate my relationships with my family, my siblings, my close friends. So when one talks about death and end-of-life, it's actually a reflection on how we want to live."*

Volunteers fan out to the communities at Chong Pang and Telok Blangah, doing home visits and setting up booths to introduce the project to residents.

NURTURING A VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY

Volunteers play an important role in helping *Both Sides, Now* kickstart conversations about end-of-life issues with audiences. Over the years, the programme has attracted a following of committed volunteers from all walks of life. Some volunteers are interested in seeing how the arts intersects with social issues while others are drawn by the universal subject of death. Each volunteer undergoes 1.5 days of training to help them create safe spaces for audiences to discuss difficult issues.

Understanding Oneself

All volunteers are encouraged to explore their own values and fears about end-of-life issues. This personal experience helps them get comfortable with the difficult topic. It also helps volunteers understand the many challenges others may face.

Learning to Listen

An important role that volunteers play is to engage with audiences. While the artworks provoke the audiences to think about the issue, the volunteers start a conversation with them to listen closely to the stories and things they have to say. Thus, they are taught the key soft skills of deep listening and being empathetic to the public.

Equipping through Role-Play

A series of drama games and activities impart volunteers with the necessary skills to facilitate conversations. To learn how to deal with emotional situations or conflict within families, they often role-play to understand the perspectives of different individuals.

Everyday Waltzes for Active Ageing

Improving the Well-Being of Seniors Through Dance

2009 - present | By The ARTS FISSION Company

The ARTS FISSION Company's dancers Edwin Wee and Mimie Tav lead a warm-up activity with seniors from AWWA, to foster social interaction. (2013)

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A wellness programme based on the principles of contemporary dance. Seniors are taught to relate their everyday movements to dance imagery and carry out these *"creative movements"* to improve their physical and mental well-being. A typical programme consists of 12 one-hour sessions that are facilitated by dance instructors.

Project Aims

- Strengthen the cognitive and physical abilities of seniors
- Help seniors become aware of their body and mind through everyday movements
- Encourage social interaction amongst seniors

Participants

Seniors and healthcare professionals

Types of Art

Dance

Peeling an orange and brewing a cup of *kopi*—these mundane activities are turned into dance movements during *Everyday Waltzes for Active Ageing*. This wellness programme by The ARTS FISSION Company helps seniors reinterpret their everyday gestures into *"creative movements"* that can be personal, imaginative and even fun.

"These creative movements come from contemporary dance which allows for the individual's response in a physical and emotional way," explained the company's Artistic Director Angela Liong. Unlike conventional dance as an activity to be perfected, such as cha-cha or ballroom dancing, *Everyday Waltzes* focuses on stimulating movement and personal memories through the use of dance imagery.

Over multiple sessions, groups of seniors share their physical responses and thoughts on various themes ranging from cultural festivals to daily chores. Their *"expressions"*—which could include the waving of hands to nodding—are then choreographed by dance facilitators into *"creative movements"* for the seniors to carry out. The choice of movements is also informed by physiotherapy to ensure the seniors move safely and improve their physical wellbeing. In the process of performing their everyday gestures as dance moves, the participants come to realise that dance can be performed anywhere. They also become more aware of the physical state of their bodies and even their minds.

"It is not exercise. There is mental imagery involved. The act of hanging the laundry when put in a dance context can conjure artistic nuances. When carried out in a rhythm, it becomes a dance," said Angela. When *Everyday Waltzes* was first introduced, she had to explain to organisations that this was not an ad-hoc activity to entertain seniors but a long-term artistic intervention to stimulate bodies and minds. *"When a person's mood is uplifted, it improves their physique, appetite and even how they interact with their caregivers and peers."*

> "The laughter and the joy conveyed by the dancers during that month really made us feel young again and for that period of time we really and truly enjoyed ourselves. We were no longer 'oldies'!"
>
> - PARTICIPANT FROM VILLA FRANCIS HOME FOR THE AGED

Seniors from Kheng Chiu Loke Tin Kee Home try their hand at movement and dance with The ARTS FISSION Company. (2018)

Since piloting *Everyday Waltzes* with a group of seniors at the Apex Day Rehabilitation Centre for Elderly (ADRC) in 2009, Arts Fission has gone on to develop a full-fledged wellness programme that many social service organisations and nursing homes have signed up for. There are currently two offerings that cater for different seniors based on their physical well-being. One seeks to reinforce the cognitive and kinetic abilities of ambulant seniors, while an intervention version emphasises hand-eye and upper torso coordination for sedentary and frail seniors. In 2014, the dance company also worked with the Agency for Integrated Care to train healthcare staff to conduct a 12-week version of *Everyday Waltzes* by themselves. Since then, The ARTS FISSION Company has run 400 sessions and reached out to some 12,000 participants. More recently, Angela and her team collaborated with neuroscientists to develop movements for persons with dementia and to validate the programme's effectiveness through research.

According to ARDC, *Everyday Waltzes* has helped its seniors build strong core muscles to minimise fall accidents in their daily lives and also develop a positive mind and body image. *"The elderly really enjoyed themselves in every session including the quieter ones. By incorporating the seniors' stories into these movements, it makes the entire exercise very exciting for them. They feel energised after each session and look forward to seeing the team every week,"* said ARDC's administrator.

While *Everyday Waltzes* began as a pioneering programme to use the arts in healthcare, Angela has also involved these seniors in their professional performances. In 2013 and 2015, she invited select senior participants to work with her young dancers to put up intergenerational performances in collaboration with The Philharmonic Orchestra. *"A lot of the young dancers gained from the life experiences of the seniors,"* said Angela. *"The seniors would say I never moved like this before, these young dancers helped me discover that it is in me."*

Reflections of the seniors from Villa Francis Home for the Aged who participated in Everyday Waltzes for Active Ageing.

Taking the cue from The ARTS FISSION Company's dancers, seniors from APEX Day Rehabilitation Centre follow a series of choreographed movements to stimulate cognitive abilities and creativity.

UPLIFTING AGEING BODIES AND MINDS

Everyday Waltzes lifts the moods of the senior participants, and ultimately, their well-being, through a variety of ways.

Tapping into Personal Memories

Participants are given themes through which they can share their personal experiences with the younger facilitators who then interpret them as dance gestures. By offering participants an unexpected and artistic perspective to a familiar act, they find delight in the ordinary.

Customising Physically-Rewarding Activities

Although *Everyday Waltzes* is not a physiotherapy programme, Angela and her team have worked with therapists to understand how particular movements can improve the physical well-being of seniors. Facilitators keep this in mind when designing creative movements. Each session also lasts up to an hour as this is the average physical limit of seniors.

Dancing as a Group

In a session, participants typically sit in a circle and are encouraged to dance with one another. Such social interaction creates a setting for them to talk and joke with one another and overcome any sense of isolation. Some seniors living in nursing homes even treat the session as a social occasion, making the effort to dress up!

Re-imagining their Environment

The programme is typically organised in nursing homes where seniors may feel institutionalised. The upbeat dance activity helps participants relate to their everyday environment in a positive way.

Superhero Me

Empowering Children of Different Abilities Through Inclusive Art-Making

2014 - present | By Superhero Me

Scenes from "Who is Coming to Dinner?", an inclusive arts workshop series held in 2017.

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A ground-up inclusive arts movement that harnesses the power of creativity to empower children from less privileged and special needs communities. *Superhero Me* focuses on social mixing programming, creative advocacy and strategic cross-sector partnerships to shape the narrative of inclusion in Singapore.

Project Aims

- Allow children of different abilities and backgrounds to socialise through the arts
- Develop a network of facilitators who understand social inequality and have empathy for children from these communities
- Expose children to various art forms

Participants

Children from special needs communities, less privileged communities and general public

Types of Art

Multi-Disciplinary

Ryle can control the weather. Crystal can fly anywhere to feed the birds. Brandvan can provide people with electricity. These were some of the superpowers dreamt up by 15 pre-schoolers in the inaugural edition of *Superhero Me* in 2014. Over 12 weeks, the children from less privileged families explored what it meant to be a superhero and created superhero costumes to wear during their graduation ceremony. This inspired them to think of their challenges and circumstances through a creative lens.

"To see things transformed into reality from paper to a doll, and then to a costume that you wear on your graduation concert, takes them through the journey of self-belief and that dreams, with effort, can turn into reality," said Jean Loo. She started this initiative with Yang Huiwen in 2014 as part of START WELL, a national movement by Lien Foundation to champion children's rights to a happy childhood. Since the pilot workshop at Care Corner in Lengkok Bahru, *Superhero Me* has become a movement that advocates for inclusivity by creating opportunities for children of different backgrounds to socialise through art. About 1,500 children have gone through *Superhero Me* workshops, with a core community of 50 children of mixed abilities, and 60 regular arts facilitators.

The non-profit arts company works with various partners like Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore School (CPASS), MINDS Lee Kong Chian Gardens School, Pathlight School and AWWA Kindle Garden to co-create projects with their students that aim to change public attitudes towards inclusion. Through art-making, the children learn patience, respect, kindness, gratitude and resilience. A teacher from CPASS said her students became more resilient as they had to overcome the physical challenge of cutting and pasting. *"The children have a variety of medical conditions, so they generally have low self-esteem and confidence,"* explained Debbie Chan. *"Through Superhero Me, they've learnt to try and not give up."*

"I have received very positive and encouraging feedback not just from the teachers and students but also the parents. This Superhero Me programme has indeed helped to make heroes out of our little ones, making them more confident and ready to face this world."

- PRINCIPAL, CPASS, KOH-LIM AI LAY

Superhero Me frequently works out of The Art Faculty at the Enabling Village, which has become a home for its 'pioneer' batch of participants from Lengkok Bahru.

A participant from Superhero Me's recent workshop series during Children's Season at ArtScience Museum.

Children from a Special Education school and mainstream preschool take part in an inclusive dance workshop.

Superhero Me also offers a platform for these children and typically-developing children from mainstream schools to socialise. As part of its *"Planet of Possibility"* exhibition in 2016, it piloted inclusive art workshops where a class of pre-schoolers were paired with a class of children from a Special Education school where they made art, played and experienced the exhibition together. Such interactive sessions broke down barriers, helping many see that the children's *"disabilities"* should be embraced and even celebrated. *Superhero Me* volunteer, Amanda Chang, found herself challenging her own perceptions of inclusivity after working with Philemon, a 10-year-old from MINDS Lee Kong Chian Gardens School who was minimally verbal. *"I have a better understanding now that there is a place for differences in our society, and that every individual can contribute to and be part of a community,"* she said.

Building on its foundation in visual arts, *Superhero Me* has expanded its repertoire to embrace the performing arts. In 2018, it collaborated with Rolypoly Family to design inclusive dance workshops for children with and without special needs to move together. Unlike visual arts activities, music and dance encourages physical contact between the children and, with the right support, gives those in wheelchairs an opportunity to break out of their physical constraints.

"Taking risks was something everyone needed to do in order to progress their practice of inclusion," said Huiwen. Her assumptions of children with special needs have been challenged many times. *"We've discovered that there's a lot of unlearning for us to do,"* she said.

Jean added, *"Art gives us the space and the platform to be able to run free with how we want to talk about certain issues like inclusion and inequality."*

WORKING INCLUSIVELY WITH COMMUNITIES

In order to empower communities through the arts, one must do thorough groundwork about the community and its issues. Before each round of programming, Jean and Huiwen set aside time to talk to families, educators, arts practitioners and children about their aspirations and needs.

Reframe Constraints with Creativity

Define a clear scope of work and be realistic about what a project can deliver. In order to achieve the maximum impact with its limited resources, *Superhero Me* does not offer its programmes to everyone. Instead, it is careful to identify suitable partners to work with over an extended period of time.

Programme, Space, Team and Personal Readiness

Any inclusive endeavour that strives for quality social interaction requires the team to be clear about their roles and how they are going to work together. Considering how "ready" a programme and space can adapt to children with behavioural challenges like autism will help the team focus on facilitating interaction. *Superhero Me* spends considerable effort to groom and train arts facilitators from all walks of life. This tight-knit community fosters a strong network of inclusion advocates, all of whom are confident interacting with children with special needs in their own communities.

Be Relevant to the Community

Be aware of how one's project works within the existing ecosystem of support, including government policies and what other organisations offer. This ensures the project can have a meaningful impact on the community's needs or aspirations. *Superhero Me* works with a multi-disciplinary team of artists, educators and parents to quickly learn what works and what others are doing.

Let's Go PLay OutSide!

Bringing Children from the Neighbourhood Together through Art

2016 - present | By 3Pumpkins

Guest artist Faye Lim from Rolypoly Family exploring agility, flow, momentum and counterbalance in the context of play with the children in Toa Payoh. (2018)

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A weekly gathering of children to participate in recreational activities led by different artists. The activities are held at the playground behind Block 150 Toa Payoh Lorong 1 and is open to the public. In July 2018, the project expanded to the open playground at Boon Lay Drive.

Project Aims

- Bring art activities to the doorstep of low-income families
- Encourage different communities in the neighbourhood to interact through art
- Foster a community by regularly intervening in a public space with arts activities

Participants

Children from Toa Payoh Lorong 1 Estate and Boon Lay Drive

Types of Art

Multi-Disciplinary

Every Saturday at 4.30p.m., the playground nestled behind Block 150 Toa Payoh Lorong 1 comes alive as children from the surrounding public housing estate come down to play. As part of *Let's Go PLay OutSide! (LGPO!)*, the group of about 30 school children participate in a variety of art activities by 3Pumpkins, led by Lin Shiyun.

The initiative started in 2016 after Shiyun collaborated with theatre company Drama Box on a site-specific project, *IgnorLAND of its Loss*, in Dakota Crescent. She was inspired by previous interactions with children from low-income families who rarely have the opportunity to play with their parents.

"I realised there was a gap. The element of play was missing in the family because the parents are too busy or have their own problems," said the artist, who specialises in working with children and families. Through an encounter with the Single Parent Support Group, she learnt about children loitering in the neighbourhood of Toa Payoh and brought paper and paint to play with them one day. This became a weekly gathering that brings the arts into the everyday lives of these children, many of whom stay in the nearby rental flats.

Each week's activities are tailored to what the children need or want to do. When Shiyun discovered many of them could not read an analogue clock, she conducted a play activity to design clock faces. Another activity arose from the children's request to design their own superhero masks. Since the start of the Toa Payoh project, about 60 artists, collaborators and volunteers have been invited to play with the children. To boost the children's self-confidence, storyteller Balakrishan Matchap and artist Marla Bendini were invited to work with them to create a play. This offered opportunities for the children to experience public speaking and to take charge of creating a production, explained Shiyun.

> "LGPO! allows children to meet practicing artists on a level playing field, in 'their own turf'. This is empowering as they feel safe in their own environment."
>
> -ARTIST FACILITATOR, ISABELLE DESJEUX

A performance by 'Silver Man', Roy Payamal, drawing in both children and adults in Toa Payoh. (2017)

A boy painting a self-portrait during an LGPO! session at Boon Lay Drive. (2018)

A visual feature added to the playground at Toa Payoh Lorong 1 Park to enhance play experiences, in collaboration with Nanyang Polytechnic School of Design (Visual Communications). (2018)

"These children are usually not chosen in school or not trusted to have certain positions. When they have a main role to play, it's very empowering," she said. *"Through play and games, we help them to discover their own strengths."*

LGPO! also seeks to show children the creative possibilities of their everyday surroundings. This is why all activities happen in a public space and make use of existing facilities. In 2017, students from Nanyang Polytechnic School of Design (Visual Communication) worked with the children to reimagine the playground and its surroundings, and design their own games. Similarly, when artist Isabelle Desjeux came to build camera obscuras with the children, they went about their neighbourhood in search of recycled cardboard boxes as raw material. *"Because the participants welcome the artists in their own environments, they are more at home. They feel proud that people would come and visit them,"* said Isabelle.

Eight-year-old Raz has enjoyed the many activities which, he felt, have improved his character. *"I used to be quite rude to people and I'd keep shouting, but I think I'm now more respectful of my teachers,"* he said.

For Shiyun, the ultimate goal of *LGPO!* is for the children to grow as a community and continue the spirit of playing together on their own and supporting one another in times of difficulty. She recalled a conversation with one of the boys who feared the group would eventually leave: *"I said, 'We cannot be here forever. He then said, 'You all stay here until I can take over!'"*

BRIDGING GAPS AND FOSTERING COMMUNITY

Developing a tight-knit community amongst residents and strangers in these neighbourhoods requires presence, patience and a sense of play.

Breaking the Ice, Organically

Art-making and play activities served as the initial platforms that brought the children together. While there were fights initially, the children gradually became better acquainted and the gatherings soon became about hanging out with friends. The weekly meet-ups allowed them to check in with each other and promoted deeper bonding.

Playing Down Difference

Differences in race, class, gender, age and nationality were apparent in the *LGPO!* neighbourhoods. In some cases, steps were taken to bridge these gaps, e.g. involving more male facilitators, polytechnic and ITE students as positive role models, encouraging the girls to speak up to be heard, or designing programmes that would involve the elderly who usually sat on their own. *LGPO!* is about people meeting one another without 'labels' and community coming together to play. Having fun together is what lowers people's guards and the understanding that develops through this process can help overcome social divides.

Developing Relationships Over Time

Unlike 'pop-up' arts events, *LGPO!* is held regularly at the same location and time over an extended duration. This gives participants a sense of continuity and helps them build long-term relationships. It also creates a regular presence in the community, encouraging others to join in. The Boon Lay project established a core group of about 30 children over three months while ongoing activities in Toa Payoh have created a core group of about 70 children and adults over two years.

Cultivating a Sense of Place and Belonging

Cultivating a Sense of Place and Belonging

Arts and culture have often been tapped on to enliven spaces as well as build a sense of community within a locality or neighbourhood. By drawing on heritage elements to tell the history of neighbourhood spaces, activating specific sites for performances and other creative approaches, artists, community partners and residents can play a collective part in cultivating ownership and injecting vitality into the spaces they live and work in.

Arts Imprints Around My Neighbourhood

Retelling Histories of Places through Site-Specific Music and Performances

2016 - 2017 | By Quek Ling Kiong

Audience gathered at the iconic Toa Payoh Dragon Playground to enjoy storytelling and live music as part of the trail.

OVERVIEW

About the Project
A series of three musical trails where various pop-up performances were organised at locations in Toa Payoh, Bedok and Yishun to tell stories of these places.

Project Aims
- Inspire residents to discover and appreciate their neighbourhood
- Tell stories of the neighbourhood through music and performance

Participants
General Public

Types of Art
Multi-Disciplinary

Inspired by its history as a hotspot for wedding photoshoots in the 1970s, *Arts Imprints Around My Neighbourhood* 我家周边的记艺 held a performance at Toa Payoh Town Park one afternoon to serenade audiences with romantic tunes such as *Bunga Sayang* and Liang Zhu's *Butterfly Lovers*, all set against the park's scenic backdrop of a landscaped pond and rustic gazebos.

This pop-up performance was one of three music and storytelling trails conceptualised and led by Quek Ling Kiong, conductor and artistic director for this project, to retell the histories of places in Singapore. Playing the role of a guide, he took audiences on a two-hour walking trail of Toa Payoh, bringing them to various iconic destinations where performers brought the estate's histories alive through song, dance and stories. While the town garden served as a backdrop for the music performance, the neighbourhood's iconic dragon playground became a stage to retell Toa Payoh's fantastical transformation from a swamp to one of Singapore's earliest public housing estates. The tour ended at the bustling HDB Hub with a finale concert, where close to 200 participants sang along to melodies they grew up with.

"I hope to give the audience a refreshed perspective to these "old" locations within the neighbourhood with this performance, so that if they pass by it next time, they can recall the emotions and fond memories that were once attached to these spaces," said Ling Kiong. Similar trails were also created for Bedok and Yishun, and in total, the trails reached out to some 7,200 participants. At Yishun, participants visited the neighbourhood's multiplex, which was Asia's first such facility when it opened. They were also presented with a clarinet performance by a descendant of Lim Nee Soon,

"I especially liked the part where we dug into local delights at the hawker centre, serenaded by beautiful tunes of Chinese instruments. The drums at the end of the programme had lots of community spirit in it. It felt like one people, one nation, one Singapore!"

- PARTICIPANT OF THE BEDOK EDITION OF *ARTS IMPRINTS*, MAY LIANG

Conductor Quek Ling Kiong (left) leading the participants on a trail through the Toa Payoh Town Park.

Participants were given a multi-sensory treat in the Yishun multiplex where musicians, including Lim Nee Soon's great-grandson, performed to roving images of old Nee Soon village. (2017)

Dicapella Dizi Ensemble performing at Bedok Food Centre which features architecture in the Minangkabau style. (2016)

whom the estate is named after. As Bedok is named after 'Bedoh', the Malay word for drum, audiences were taught simple percussion beats to participate in a finale drum performance.

Drumming was also featured at Yishun, where Low Yik Hang, a facilitator of a drum circle in Yishun, composed a drumming work inspired by his research on Chong Pang. *"Bridging the history of the neighbourhood and raising awareness of local cultural heritage through traditional performing arts, I felt a deeper sense of belonging to the community,"* said Yik Hang.

As the musicians in such trails were performing outside their usual confines of a concert hall, Ling Kiong felt it was important for them to engage the audience differently. In Bedok, for instance, participants visited the Bedok Food Centre which features architecture in the Minangkabau style—the food centre is arranged around a central courtyard, recalling the communal life of the area's *kampong* (village) past. Drawing inspiration from the architecture, the participants were treated to local delicacies such as *chng teng* and *goreng pisang*, as Dicapella Dizi Ensemble, a bamboo flute ensemble, played familiar Malay tunes such as *Rasa Sayang*.

A performer and composer for this series, Ismahairie Putra was intrigued by the stories about Yishun and Toa Payoh. *"We are bringing the music to the people in the neighbourhood, thus giving a sense that music can be very approachable, down to earth, and that it is for everyone to enjoy,"* said the musician, who plays the violin and lute. *"I hope that by doing this, the audience will be more open and receptive towards music."*

BRINGING THE ARTS TO THE HEARTLANDS

To use the arts to engage audiences in a more meaningful way, artists performing in a neighbourhood can adopt a variety of approaches.

Drawing Inspiration From the Neighbourhood

To bring out the uniqueness of each neighbourhood and create relevant content, Ling Kiong researched extensively on the heritage of each town. This entailed multiple field trips to observe and be immersed in the hustle and bustle of the neighbourhoods. For example, Ling Kiong fashioned pineapple-shaped shakers to reflect that Nee Soon was once a pineapple plantation. He also selected songs inspired by the respective towns to reflect each neighbourhoods' character.

Reimagining Everyday Spaces

The curated trail brought the audience to many familiar and iconic spaces such as hawker centres, town squares, playgrounds and parks in the neighbourhood. Through the performances and narration, as well as the facilitation of the Artistic Director, the audience were able to rediscover and appreciate these daily spaces differently.

Involving the Audience

To better engage the audience, Ling Kiong introduced many interactive elements throughout the performances. Audience were involved in making their own shakers or given simple handheld props such as "cloud and fire shapes" to be used during the performance. For example, at Toa Payoh's Dragon Playground, audience members 'deployed' their props, adding visual and sound effects to the fictional tale about the dragon as it played out.

Arts@My Queenstown

Rallying Residents to Celebrate Singapore's First Satellite Housing Estate

2007 - present | By My Community

Queenstown Community Centre's Cantonese Opera troupe with Guest-of-Honour, Minister of State, Heng Chee How, and Grassroots Advisor, Dr Chia Shi Lu, at the side lines of Street Parade @ My Queenstown, 2013.

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A ground-up arts initiative that celebrates the rich cultural heritage of Queenstown. Through heritage walks, arts exhibitions and community festivals, this community group seeks to celebrate the little things which make the neighbourhood special and reconnect individuals to social networks in the community.

Project Aims

- Bring Queenstown's residents together through the arts and culture
- Commemorate Queenstown's rich cultural heritage

Participants

Residents of Queenstown and the General Public

Types of Art

Multi-Disciplinary

Neither Kwek Li Yong nor Jasper Tan live in Queenstown, but they have advocated for the public housing estate's heritage for over a decade. From publishing residents' stories in a blog to organising tours around the neighbourhood, the pair has brought together a community through a citizen-initiated effort.

Their love for Queenstown was ignited in 2007 when Li Yong became intrigued by the residents and their memories after visiting the estate for community service. He roped in his friend Jasper and they began knocking on residents' doors and frequenting Queenstown to document the social heritage of Singapore's first satellite housing estate. These stories were shared on a blog in the beginning, and the duo soon started giving tours around the estate.

"At first, it was only the two of us, but as we saw more interest in our heritage tours and we recruited our first volunteer, we knew we had to expand," recalled Jasper.

In 2010, they registered My Community as a society to organise activities that bring together residents of Queenstown. One example was *My Queenstown Festival*, an event to commemorate its 60th anniversary in 2013. Over four weekends, the estate hosted exhibitions and arts performances about Queenstown. The Queenstown Cantonese Opera Troupe and local pop band The Quests, whose members formerly lived in Queenstown, returned to the neighbourhood to perform and relive their good old days.

The residents of Queenstown also got involved by working with the Tapestry Playback Theatre to put up the performance, *This is Where I Live. This is My Story.* In this interactive form of theatre, a facilitator and the performers improvised using movement, props, music and the spoken word to bring alive stories told by the participants. As Queenstown residents recounted stories about their neighbours, the performers re-enacted the accounts to help audiences reflect on the ties amongst the community and learn about

> "The arts and cultural programmes provide an opportunity for residents to meet others and bring people with similar interests together. By introducing different activities, we also get to meet different kinds of people too."
>
> - RESIDENT AND MY COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER, GRACE TNG

Popular 1960s band The Quests, which originated from Queenstown Secondary School, held a series of concerts at Block 88 Tanglin Halt Road in February 2018.

Residents participating in a community sketch with the Band of Doodlers at Block 88 Tanglin Halt.

Visual Artist Tan Chwee Seng demonstrates sketch techniques in a sketch walk, Artsy Avenues, at Singapore's first HDB flats in Queenstown.

neighbourliness from one another. A resident at the play, Anthony Chua, found the experience entertaining and engaging. *"It was very authentic and connected with the audience,"* he said.

It was important that the festival brought people together not just to watch but to participate, said Li Yong. *"Arts is a medium for people to connect with the past and for residents to connect with each other,"* he added. *"Most importantly, we came together as a community to create new memories for people."*

In 2016, My Community joined the National Arts Council Arts and Culture Nodes network to bring regular arts programmes to Queenstown. These include performances at Block 88 Tanglin Halt Road and a giant mural featuring the town's landmarks created by the Band of Doodlers together with residents. Building on its popular heritage trails, My Community is also starting art trails in 2018 to introduce the town and its unique stories to residents and visitors alike, through activities such as sketching and photography. Since joining the NAC Arts and Culture Nodes network, My Community has engaged over 16,000 attendees through its arts programmes.

Grace Tng started volunteering with My Community after attending its free monthly guided tours in 2014. *"They were very passionate and I wanted to share what I had experienced with others too,"* said the independent curator who had just moved into the estate then. *"I had the opportunity to meet my neighbours and know more about them."*

NURTURING A COMMUNITY OVER TIME

Having worked with the Queenstown community for over a decade, My Community shows how having a presence rooted in the community worked for them:

Winning the Community's Trust

Li Yong and Jasper visited the residents many times over the years. Their sincerity moved residents to open their doors, share stories and even loan artefacts for exhibitions. The regular presence of the group has attracted residents to host visitors of My Community's tours and even convinced some to become volunteers.

Understanding the Estate Inside Out

As they spent time with residents, the duo learnt about the sites in Queenstown. This helped them develop insightful stops along their trails. For instance, one of their sketch trails includes a visit to the Blessed Sacrament Church, whose unique roof lends itself favourably as a subject for sketchers. Li Yong and Jasper are also aware of the habits of residents, enabling them to identify suitable locations and timings for arts events.

Creating a Strong Volunteer Base

Volunteers are the backbone of My Community and make up a close-knit team. Retreats, town halls, and socials are organised to help the volunteers bond. Volunteer roles are also matched with the volunteers' skill sets so they can be involved effectively.

Building a Network of Supporters

My Community's long-term presence in Queenstown made it easier for them to secure support and funding from the government and donors. They have also developed a network of partners such as Sheng Siong Supermarket which allows My Community to stage arts performance outside their premises.

Kallang ArtsTreats

Enlivening the Neighbourhood Through the Performing Arts

2012 - present | By Kallang Community Club

A Teochew puppetry show for the public by Penang's Teochew Puppet & Opera House held outside Boon Keng MRT station as part of ArtsTreats 2017. The troupe spent about 15 minutes taking photos and engaging with the audience after the hour-long performance.

OVERVIEW

About the Project

Kallang ArtsTreats is a suite of regular arts programmes organised by Kallang Community Club which includes the outdoor programme series, ArtsBites, and quarterly signature programmes such as *Kallang ArtsTreats* Festival, Tea Time Opera, Malay Cultural Night and Indian Cultural Night.

Project Aims

- Promote community bonding through the arts
- Cultivate arts and culture appreciation in the community

Participants

Families and seniors

Types of Art

Multi-Disciplinary

Over two days in November 2017, commuters exiting Boon Keng MRT station found themselves greeted by a pop-up orchestra and roving jazz musicians. These artists enthralled audiences with their performances, even halting passers-by in transit. The buzz generated was all part of the *Kallang ArtsTreats* Festival, an annual event that has been running for the past six years.

This signature event is part of a series of arts programmes presented by Kallang Community Club (CC), one of the many Arts and Culture Nodes island-wide. This network of nodes is developed by the National Arts Council for people to come together to experience the arts in their neighbourhood. Other signature programmes by *Kallang ArtsTreats* include quarterly performances by Chinese, Malay and Indian performing arts groups. There is also ArtsBites, a monthly showcase of artists outside Boon Keng MRT station.

After Kallang CC became a node in 2012, its chairman Tom Bay and his team refined their programming approach to incorporate more established artists and arts groups. In the last six years, they have featured arts groups like the Temple of Fine Arts, Kim Giak Low Choon Teochew Puppetry Troupe (Penang), Paper Monkey Theatre, RaghaJazz, Chinese Theatre Circle, and NADI Singapura. *"We bring quality performing arts into the heartlands for residents,"* explained Tom.

Shanghai Jazz Club has performed several times at Kallang and the band's singer, Dawn Wong, enjoys how the programme attracts a different demographic from typical performing arts venues. *"It is great to be able to bring the music to the audience (as opposed to expecting the audience to come to us) because the bulk of our audience comprises older folk who may have difficulty traveling far,"* she said. *"I am of the belief that the arts shouldn't be restricted to high-brow venues or 'special occasions' and bringing our art into the heartlands of Kallang is something we enjoy very much."*

> "When the weather is kind and people gather around to watch, the feeling of community is strong... People of all walks of life and races take pause in that space [outside Boon Keng MRT station] together for an arts performance. That to me is beautiful."
>
> - DAWN WONG, SHANGHAI JAZZ CLUB

While Kallang CC has started arts programming beyond its walls, the CC courtyard still provides a conducive performing space for artists and audiences alike. BronzAge Gamelan Ensemble performing in the open courtyard during ArtsTreats 2013.

Utilising modern and traditional instruments, RaghaJazz brings its brand of jazz fusion to Bendemeer Mall. (2017) Photo credit: Rogan Yeoh

Indian Cultural Night put up by Temple of Fine Arts at the Kallang CC Multi-purpose Hall features Indian classical dance and music by multi-ethnic performers. (2017)

To reach more residents, Tom Bay and his team began activating more spaces around the neighbourhood, including outside the bustling Boon Keng MRT station. *"[It is] better to bring the events to the MRT station where there's more crowd. If [the programmes happen only] at the CC, only the people who go to the CC will know about it,"* Tom said. *"This makes the town livelier too." Kallang ArtsTreats* programmes have reached out to about 10,000 attendees annually from 2015 to 2017.

These performances bring to residents arts experiences they may not usually encounter or seek out. *Kallang ArtsTreats* programmes are typically accompanied by short introductions to the art forms being presented. As the node has started focusing more on traditional and multi-cultural arts programmes, this has also provided audiences with opportunities for a deeper understanding of various ethnic cultures.

Kallang ArtsTreats has not only brought residents closer to the arts—artists have benefitted too. The atypical performance site has proved to be popular with artists. NADI Singapura, a contemporary Malay drums and percussion group, has performed several times at Kallang CC to packed crowds. *"[Kallang ArtsTreats] is a great effort and should be continued, as it serves as a bridge linking professional artists with the community,"* said the group.

Tom could not agree more as he has befriended many artists and also introduced them to his community. *"The arts is an easy way to connect people."*

ATTRACTING AUDIENCES TO THE ARTS

In a neighbourhood where residents are not necessarily seeking out the arts, there are a variety of ways to introduce the arts into their everyday lives.

Activating More Spaces Around the Community

Kallang ArtsTreats programmes take place at bustling public spaces just outside Boon Keng MRT station and the nearby Bendemeer Mall. This increases opportunities for residents to encounter the arts with their neighbours, and also enlivens the neighbourhood.

Developing a Regular Audience Base Through Regular Programmes

Kallang ArtsTreats programmes follow a regular schedule. This encourages residents to look forward to the next event and make a habit of attending these programmes.

Listening to the Audience

After each event, Kallang CC conducts surveys to find out who their audience is and how they can improve. The feedback ranges from thoughts on the performance to the quality of the sound system. In response to audience feedback, Kallang ArtsTreats programmes have shifted to Friday evenings as well as Saturday mornings and afternoons, when more people may attend them. Similarly, Chinese opera sessions were moved from the evenings to tea-time after it was learnt that seniors did not like to stay out late.

Encouraging Creative Expression

Encouraging Creative Expression

Exploring a new art form, joining an interest group, or taking part in a small-scale performance are just a few of the many means for anyone to participate in art-making. The best part is that prior experience is not required.

Theatre for Seniors

Equipping Seniors to Tell Their Stories Through Theatre

2008 - 2011 | By The Necessary Stage

October by The Necessary Stage, 30 October–10 November 2012. Photo credit: Caleb Ming / SURROUND

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A three-year theatre programme that trained seniors in the essential skills of theatre-making by professional practitioners. This included learning acting, playwriting and directing, as well as administration and technical work.

Project Aims

- Enable seniors to organise and carry out their own community theatre practices
- Empower seniors to impart their personal stories through the arts
- Offer seniors new ways of looking at their life histories and cultural identities

Participants

Seniors recruited through open calls

Types of Art

Theatre

When Tan Ken Keat attended a play that his mother and her friends were acting in, he was sceptical about how the group of seniors would fare.

"I expected forgotten stage lines, unnatural acting and even thought it would be more of a comedy to see seniors who have no professional experience in stage-acting perform," he said. To his surprise, Ken Keat ended up laughing along with the heart-warming drama and even teared up. "These seniors on stage were really good! It was mind-blowing and I enjoyed the show immensely."

Since its inception in 2008, *Theatre for Seniors* (TFS) has been showcasing what seniors can do on stage. This community theatre programme was started by The Necessary Stage (TNS) when its artistic director Alvin Tan realised his retiree parents did not have many social activities.

"I've always wanted to start this *Theatre for Seniors*. Singapore focuses a lot on young people's theatre—it's very youth-centric," he said. With the support from Council for Third Age, Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple and the National Arts Council, TNS launched a three-year curriculum that taught participants above the age of 50 how to make theatre. From acting classes to workshops on production and history of theatre, a group of approximately 50 seniors learnt the necessary skills to script, act and even administer a theatre group on their own. Each year, the group staged sold-out productions where they performed plays, including skits devised from their personal experiences. For instance, the multilingual play, *@24*, explored the significant moments in their youth. Retiree Bernard Huan reminisced about an incident in the 1960s where he took his British girlfriend out to a party and got caught in a fight. She had been hit in the head by a beer bottle and her father, a British army camp commander, threatened to shut down Huan's father's provision

"It was an amazing experience and we enjoyed it thoroughly. We were the generation that had to concentrate on very real bread and butter issues right from our youth. Our creative needs had to be put on hold, or in most cases, put to sleep. Now would be the best time to allow those dormant dreams to come to reality even if it is for the fun of it."

- PARTICIPANT, ROHANI A ROZAK

Theatre-devising workshop with Serena Ho. (2017) Photo credit: Karmen Wong

Pioneer (Girls) Generation by The Necessary Stage, 25–28 March 2015. Photo credit: Caleb Ming / SURROUND

Family Secrets by The Necessary Stage. A commission of Esplanade's A Date with Friends (10-12 March 2017) comprising two plays by Haresh Sharma - Don't Forget to Remember Me and Don't Know. Photo credit: Ken Cheong

shop just outside the camp. Although the threat never materialised, Huan always remembered this incident because he was worried about what would happen to his family who depended on the shop for their livelihood.

Besides giving seniors an opportunity to explore their memories and express themselves, the programme also introduced their loved ones to the arts and changed perceptions about what seniors are capable of. Tim Tam, the husband of a participant, said TFS helped his wife, Gladys, to pursue a passion for theatre which had eluded her when she was younger. *"Her participation has enabled her to develop her latent acting skills, which have in turn given her the opportunity to explore different avenues in the Singaporean acting scene, such as helping Tisch School of the Arts students make short films as part of their coursework,"* he said.

Between 2008 and 2010, *Theatre for Seniors* has reached about 2,300 audience members through their performances. Since the programme concluded in 2011, TFS graduates have gone on to perform in others plays and become advocates for theatre. A group of them even formed a spin-off *Theatre for Seniors* Interest Group to engage the public through performances and related events. TNS has also trained selected seniors to conduct basic acting workshops, and they have engaged more than 200 seniors in collaboration with various Community Development Councils and the National Library Board.

Participant Thomas Lim said TFS has helped him appreciate theatre more and even encouraged him to watch more local plays. *"To me and my course mates, the course means memories of youth and the past, among other things,"* he said. *"It makes us feel that we're still young at heart."*

A STAGE OF THEIR OWN

Community theatre enables seniors from different walks of life to work together to share their personal memories with one another as well as loved ones, spreading the love of theatre to others.

Forming a Diverse and Cohesive Group

TFS attracted people from different backgrounds because it was advertised in the newspapers and opened to members of the public. This introduced seniors to people outside their work and home, allowing them to learn about lives different from their own.

Telling the Stories of Seniors

Presented with opportunities to tell their stories through theatre, participants challenged stereotypical perceptions of seniors. This included their age and choice to commit to theatre, which some perceived them to be too old to be involved in. Theatre-making became a way for the group to convey what it means to be a senior.

Performing for Their Families and Friends

Many participants were encouraged by their children to sign up, and the programme started conversations about expectations, schedules and support. The annual performances, which were attended by their families, became an occasion for the seniors to share their personal stories through theatre with their loved ones.

Continuing Their Love for Theatre

Even after the three-year programme, the seniors continue to use their new skills in various ways. While some formed an independent group to continue performing, others became drama facilitators and taught theatre to other communities. There were also individuals who became actors for student films and skits organised by government agencies.

Community Drumming Network

Supporting Self-Expression Through Freely Drumming With Others

2010 - present | By Community Drumming Network

Residents gather around a weekly drum circle held at Kallang Community Club. (2012)

OVERVIEW

About the Project

An interest group network formed by groups of drumming enthusiasts who organise various activities and performances to share the love of community drumming. Besides hosting regular drumming sessions at Community Clubs across the country, the network organises an annual Celebration of Drums where different drumming and percussion groups come together to perform.

Project Aims

- Promote drumming as a healthy and enjoyable activity for all
- Bring the community together as one

Participants

General Public

Types of Art

Music

The easiest way to bring people together is to put a drum between them. This was how Soh Geok Kee rounded up a circle of friends at community clubs across Singapore. Over a decade ago, she attended a workshop in Canada where more than 300 participants were each given an instrument to participate in a community drumming circle. *"We didn't know what we were doing, but the facilitator guided us,"* recalled Geok Kee, who is better known as Ms Soh in the circle. *"In the end, it was so shiok… some of us were jumping, dancing and singing!"*

The experience of strangers coming together convinced Ms Soh to introduce community drumming to Kallang Community Club (CC) where she was then the Chairperson of its Management Committee. In 2007, with the help of local drumming group, One HeartBeat Percussions, she and other grassroots members started drumming weekly at the CC's courtyard where they attracted many onlookers.

"It begins with people you know, and then curious people will be invited in. When they feel invited, they come back," explained a facilitator. While the circle started with mostly seniors, they were soon joined by adults and even children. *"This is good for our community because there are no barriers. No such thing as you're good and I'm bad. We all just play for fun."*

This joy of freely drumming with others convinced Angela Lai to join and stay in the circle despite having no experience in drumming. She recalled how one member of their circle who is autistic enjoys hitting the drum to his own beat yet could play along with everyone else because of how drum circles operate. Each circle is led by a facilitator who is trained to involve all participants in the drumming and allow them to play in whatever way they want. *"It has an energy on its own. No one dictates, it just flows. There is no judgement,"* said Angela. *"It's a platform for people to feel good and feel accepted."*

"You don't need to know music, you don't need language, you don't need age barrier. Just go, pick up the instrument and play. The entry point is so low, and everyone can come, and that is why it is easy to start."

- MEMBER OF THE KALLANG CC DRUM CIRCLE

Participants adding to the rhythm with percussion instruments at the Celebration of Drums event at Vivocity in 2012. The annual event draws an estimated 500-600 participants and is organised by the Community Drumming Network.

TENKO, a Japanese taiko drum ensemble performing at Celebration of Drums in 2014.

In 2008, Angela, together with leaders of other drum circles, were trained as facilitators in order to grow and sustain their drum circles. This grew into the *Community Drumming Network* (*CDN*) in 2010 with the help of the People's Association and the National Arts Council. As part of the network's efforts to promote drumming in Singapore, it sends facilitators to Community Clubs or schools interested in setting up a drum circle to help kickstart its formation. Over the years, close to 20 groups have been formed in CCs such as Ayer Rajah, Hougang and Pioneer. These groups are home to about 300 regular *CDN* members islandwide. Additionally, different drum circles organise *'Happy Drumming'* events periodically at their CCs where all who love to drum congregate to play—some of which draw up to 200 participants each time.

Just as community drumming respects individual expression, the network encourages each group to develop its own style of drumming and facilitating, said Angela. This diversity is showcased during the network's annual Celebration of Drums festival. Besides this anchor event, the network is also regularly invited to facilitate other drum circles as well as perform at events such as Chingay, the Singapore Night Festival and i Light Marina Bay.

"The strong sense of community amongst the drummers is characteristic of participatory drum circles," said Ms Soh, who continues to drum weekly with 20 to 30 regulars. *"Like how it started over a decade ago, anyone can pop in to drum. This was what community arts should be about,"* said Angela. *"It's any kind of art form that can bring everybody together to create a piece of work, be it music or painting,"* she said. *"It's the effort of everybody."*

CDN drummers getting ready for their performance at the National Day Parade in 2016. (Photo courtesy of Celebrations Committee, NDP 2016)

DRUMMING TO ONE'S OWN BEAT

Drum circles enable participants to freely express themselves through music and movement. According to a 2012 study conducted by the National Institute of Education-Centre for Arts Research in Education, this is achieved in a variety of ways:

Play However You Want

The flexible nature of community drumming allows participants to freely express themselves. A member of the Kallang drum circle enjoys community drumming more so than playing in a music band: *"In a band, we have a music sheet and you don't have the freedom to play what you like. But in community drumming, there isn't any music sheet to follow, so whatever you play is right, as long as you're playing, everything is right!"*

No Experience Required

The low entry level gives anyone the opportunity to play and grow at their own pace. Playing in a group also helps participants overcome the fear of failure. Over time, they even develop the confidence to perform in public, said a member of the Clementi drum circle. *"I never thought that people our age have the ability to perform on stage as well as off stage. This is definitely a large change in my life."*

Having Fun with Friends

Drumming helps participants release stress and relax through making friends and picking up a new hobby. A member of the Hougang drum circle said, *"It gets boring at home and this is a good way to make friends. I also get to play music and learn more things."*

Open Homes

Transforming Homes For Residents To Stage Their Life Stories

2015 and 2017 | By Theatre Today

David Flynn and his family sharing about their family philosophy on making things and thinking with their hands. Photo credit: Jeffrey Tan

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A platform where residents co-created and performed intimate theatrical experiences in their own homes. Over six rehearsal sessions, residents worked with theatre-makers to script their life experiences into performances held inside their homes.

Project Aims

- Provide opportunities for regular homeowners with no theatre background to reflect, recall and retell their life experiences
- Connect strangers through the sharing of stories
- Encourage audiences to open their minds to the experiences of others

Participants

Home owners

Types of Art

Theatre

Three seniors invited strangers into their houses for the *Open Homes* @ Silver Arts 2017. Not only did public visitors step inside the living spaces of these hosts, they also heard the seniors' life stories as part of an intimate theatre performance. An actress revealed how she came to terms with her mother abandoning the family. A retiree recounted her lifelong passion for Cantonese opera. A bachelor shared his domestic bliss in the upkeep of a picture-perfect home. Together, these stories showed audiences how life does not become dull even when one gets on in age.

This idea of turning homes into stages for personal theatre came about in 2015 when Jeffrey Tan wanted to introduce art to residents in a more intimate manner. Then working with a grassroots organisation, he paired 25 residents with theatre-makers to co-create 30-minute performances staged in their living rooms. The success of this inaugural *Open Homes* led to subsequent editions commissioned by the Singapore International Festival of the Arts (SIFA) in 2017, and then the Silver Arts festival in the same year. All three editions drew about 2,200 attendees in all.

"Open Homes is about opening minds, opening hearts and opening houses," said Jeffrey. *"It encourages people, regardless of experience or background, to share life lessons that are important to them."*

At *Open Homes* SIFA 2017, participant Khir Johari recalled memories of his friend, Daisy Devan, the forgotten *"Mother Music of Singapura"* who championed local music in the 1970s and 1980s. Besides recounting how they first met, Johari also worked with audience members to re-enact a conversation he witnessed between Daisy, then the general manager of EMI Music Singapore, and singer Anita Sarawak, who eventually signed on with the label and became a star. These tales

> "I talked about things which I've never been able to talk about. I even cried during rehearsal because I've never openly said certain things."
>
> - HOMEOWNER WHO PERFORMED AT OPEN HOMES 2017, NURHANA JAMALUDIN

Visual Artist Tang Ling Nah sharing with the Open Homes audience her journey towards creating her own space. Photo credit: Jeffrey Tan

Three families got together to share about their friendship and love for quilt blankets. Photo credit: Jeffrey Tan

Co-creator and host Arjuntha describes her creation 'I am'—a work about forgotten medicinal plant secrets of the Malay archipelago—in her garden. Photo credit: Jeffrey Tan

of Singapore's local music scene were brought alive by artefacts, including Johari's big wooden coffee table, which was filled with vinyl records, books and artefacts from that era.

Besides getting residents to share intimate stories, *Open Homes* also broke down barriers between people, particularly for people living in a high-rise and high-density city like Singapore. Jeffrey recalled how an audience member hugged and thanked a resident who shared about his experience of caring for his mother with dementia. *"You start out as strangers, but you become friends after the 30-minute experience,"* he said. *"It's the generosity and hospitality that brings a warm feeling to the experience which you are not going to get in a black box theatre."*

To encourage residents to open up their homes and themselves, Jeffrey and his team worked closely with them over six rehearsals to uncover their stories and craft a performance. The theatre-makers also helped residents transform their homes and objects into settings and props for storytelling. According to one of the programme's mentors, Ebelle Chong, *"using the home is very important, as the physical space allows the audience to go on a journey, both emotionally and mentally."*

For the many participants who were new to theatre-making, *Open Homes* helped them understand the hard work needed to put up a show. It also demonstrated how anyone can participate in theatre. *"There's the perception by the general public that theatre is expensive, you need certain skills to do this well,"* said Jeffrey. *"Open Homes breaks all barriers to say that if you've got a moving story, if you've got a meaningful experience to share, the people are willing to listen."*

ENABLING OTHERS TO SHARE THEIR STORIES

The right support is needed to empower individuals with no experience in theatre to narrate stories and co-create a performance.

Encouraging Self-Expression

While it is easy for a theatre-maker to direct what participants should say and do, co-creating a performance means listening to what the participants are saying or are not comfortable to say. Some participants may censor themselves, but others may go on forever. Theatre-makers have to negotiate with the participants to understand what their story is about and help them realise the implications of what they are sharing.

Providing Prompts

To help participants think about what they want to talk about, one can offer questions and interpretations of their stories to help trigger memories. Once, a participant's story did not seem particularly engaging until Jeffrey noticed a painting in the home. Asking the participant about it prompted him to reveal a challenging episode that he was coping with.

Staying Real

There is a difference between preaching and sharing. There is also a tendency for participants to "act" and not be themselves. This creates performances that are forced and not engaging. To create real and intimate theatre, Jeffrey and his team worked closely with participants to bring out their stories and create a suitable setting for the performance.

Sounding Motion

Taking Seniors on an Adventure in Sound and Contemporary Art

2013 | By anGie seah and Zai Tang

Participants recording sounds of their surroundings at Botanic Gardens. The use of cassette recorders provides a familiar tool for the seniors and lends a nostalgic quality to the collected sounds that is part of the project's aesthetic.

OVERVIEW

About the Project

A community arts project held over seven sessions where seniors were introduced to contemporary art through sound. After learning concepts about sound, the seniors went on field trips to record audio clips from their surroundings. These sounds were translated into visual and performative art pieces through guided workshops. The artworks were exhibited at the 2013 Silver Arts exhibition which drew more than 5,000 visitors.

Project Aims

- Help seniors rediscover their environment through auditory stimuli
- Introduce seniors to new art forms
- Bring seniors outside of their everyday routine

Participants

Seniors from Tampines Changkat Community Club, Silver Connect group

Types of Art

Multi-Disciplinary

They visited places of interest such as the Singapore Botanic Gardens, the Science Centre and the temples of Waterloo Street. But beyond just taking in the sights, 14 seniors listened out for interesting ambient sounds and noises within the environment. With a cassette tape recorder in hand, they collected sounds to create art works as part of *Sounding Motion*, a project that introduced seniors to contemporary art.

Conceptualised by artist anGie seah, this seven-week project helped participants discover how sound could be experienced beyond just the auditory realm and become an ingredient for art-making. Beginning with three tours of different locations to record sounds, the participants played the role of *"acoustic geographers,"* treating their everyday environment as a living source of musical information and rediscovering how sound affects one's experience of space. anGie, who has always wanted to be a tour guide, said the tours not only helped her break the ice with the seniors, but also brought to life the abstract subjects of art and sound.

"It's already very strange for them sometimes, so I have to put myself in the shoes of someone who does not know anything about art," said the artist who often imagines her father, a butcher, as an audience of her work. *"How can I at least make them feel good being with their friends and doing something together?"*

After the tours, anGie, together with sound artist Zai Tang, guided the seniors through the process of turning their recorded sounds into art. Through the activity of designing album covers for their cassette recordings and then constructing drawings in response to sounds played to them, the seniors learnt how they could visualise what they heard. It also showed them how contemporary art can be used to express themselves, said anGie. *"I wanted to show them art could be related to their everyday lives, in how they perceive sounds and visuals, and tell stories. These are the ingredients we normally use in contemporary art."*

"From the beginning until the end, I learnt a lot, from nothing to something new. We learn to train our hearing, to focus on our surroundings... transfer our experience into art."

- PARTICIPANT, KAMARIAH BTE TOHID, 51

Sound artist Zai Tang and visual artist anGie seah respond to the "sound drawings" created by the participants.

The seniors get creative as they design their own cassette album covers, in relation to the sounds captured in each cassette. Their artworks have included objects like trees, electrical sparks and even the Rochor landscape.

Using a programmed Xbox Kinect (motion-sensing) device, the sound recordings from the field trips are combined with a series of movement exercises to create a live soundscape. The seniors' bodies become instruments and the means to interact with different sounds.

Participant Tay Kwee Kim enjoyed the opportunity to create art in ways that were completely new to her. *"When we were young we didn't get the chance to draw, now we are like children trying this out,"* she said.

In the project's last two sessions, the seniors discovered how to relate their bodies to sound. By moving their hands and torsos in front of a motion sensing device hooked up to a digital mix of their recordings, they *"performed"* live reinterpretations of what they had heard in the places they visited. *"With a little guidance, they began to free up their body and explore sounds through their movements too,"* said Zai. *"They were trying to search for their sound, not just the sound they were shaping with their bodies, but the sound that's also internal."*

This opportunity for the seniors to interact with digital technology was another important aspect of the project. While the analogue cassette tape recorder offered the seniors a familiar piece of technology to start with, involving them in a digital artwork demonstrated to them the possibilities of a new medium. Programme coordinator Phyllis Tng noticed this mindset change in the participants. *"The seniors started off very wary of technology. But during recording, they had lots of fun and were very creative—some of them recorded sounds coming out of the drain. They found out that it wasn't that frightening after all."*

INTRODUCING ART TO BEGINNERS

Working with communities who are unfamiliar with the arts often means dealing with the unknown. One has to improvise along the way and rely on an assortment of approaches:

Be Flexible

Participants may come from a variety of backgrounds so it is important to accommodate their differences. It is good to have a clear objective but be open to how that can be achieved. While *Sounding Motion* brought seniors on field trips to record sounds, they were also encouraged to bring the recorders home. This helped them familiarise themselves with the equipment and also tape sounds in environments they were more comfortable with.

Set Achievable Targets

Art can be daunting to participants so it is important to have specific goals that can be achieved within a lesson. For instance, workshop participants were encouraged to complete one tangible artwork for each *Sounding Motion* session. These small exercises were based on the same subject—their recordings—but allowed them to experiment with different forms of art expression.

Speak Their Language

'Art speak' can be confusing and many seniors are not well-versed in English. Being conversant in Hokkien, Malay, English and Mandarin worked to anGie's advantage when it came to communicating with the seniors. When planning lessons and materials, putting oneself in the shoes of someone who has no prior knowledge can be helpful.

Project Bios

10 x 10

Ceriph is an independently run book publication in Singapore that seeks to share Singapore creative work in the form of prose, poetry, social commentaries, photography and visual art. It aims to celebrate, record and share these everyday musings without inhibition.

Project URL:
www.facebook.com/ceriphjournal

Both Sides Now: Living With Dying

Drama Box is a non-profit company known for creating theatre that inspires dialogue, reflection and change. Founded in 1990, Drama Box brings theatre to the community so that everyone can have the means to access and participate. By shining a spotlight on marginalised narratives and making space for the communal contemplation of complex issues, they seek to tell stories that provoke a deeper understanding of Singapore's culture, history and identity.
www.dramabox.org

ArtsWok Collaborative is an arts-based community development organisation that connects communities by harnessing the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference. The group works with multidisciplinary teams to design and run community-based arts projects, an annual youth theatre festival with a social conscience, a community of practice and incubator programme as well as conducts research.
www.artswok.org

Project URL: www.bothsidesnow.sg

Everyday Waltzes

The ARTS FISSION Company is the longest incorporated contemporary dance company in Singapore. Since 1994, it has built up a diverse and ground-breaking dance-making track record under the artistic direction of Angela Liong, recipient of the Cultural Medallion in 2009. The company not only applies its creative energy to cutting-edge dance work, but also incorporates innovation to turn community outreach projects into rich human experiences.
www.artsfission.org

Superhero Me

Superhero Me is a ground-up inclusive arts movement that harnesses the power of creativity through the arts to empower children from less privileged backgrounds and special needs communities. We focus on inclusive programming, creative advocacy and strategic cross-sector partnerships to shape the narrative of inclusion in Singapore. From its birth in 2014 as part of an early childhood programme by Lien Foundation, Superhero Me has reached out to close to 18,000 people through a myriad of outreach efforts. It is now a registered non-profit arts company supported by the Foundation and National Arts Council's Seed Grant from 2017-2020.

Project URL: www.superherome.sg

Let's Go PLay OutSide!

3Pumpkins is a think-tank for children's issues started by independent educator, producer and artist Lin Shiyun. It develops performances, interactive spaces and art programmes that address issues concerning children and families.

Project URL:
www.facebook.com/groups/letsgoplayoutsidesg

Arts Imprints Around My Neighbourhood

Quek Ling Kiong is the Resident Conductor of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) and Music Director of the Singapore National Youth Chinese Orchestra (SNYCO). He has helped SCO gain a wider appeal among the masses through choreographing many of its well-received concerts. This includes SCO's Mother's Day Concert, Concerts for children, Community Series concerts, Music Oasis Series concerts, Caring Series concerts and Lunchtime Concerts. As a recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award in 2002, Ling Kiong is committed to spreading his passion and knowledge of music to budding young musicians.

Arts@My Queenstown

My Community has been a Node Partner under the National Arts Council's Arts and Culture Nodes Network since 2016. It is a civic society which documents social memories, celebrates civic life and champions community arts and heritage. *Arts@My Queenstown* by My Community celebrates Queenstown heritage through regular arts trails and performances.
www.mycommunity.org.sg

Project URL:
www.facebook.com/myqueenstown/

Kallang ArtsTreats

Kallang Community Club has been a Node Partner under the National Arts Council's Arts and Culture Nodes Network since 2012. *Kallang ArtsTreats* by Kallang Community Club enlivens the neighbourhoods of Kallang and Boon Keng with various traditional and multi-cultural arts programmes by professional arts groups throughout the year.
http://www.facebook.com/kallangartstreats/

Theatre for Seniors

The Necessary Stage (TNS) is a non-profit theatre company with the mission of creating challenging, indigenous and innovative theatre that touches the heart and mind. It was formed in 1987 by current Artistic Director Alvin Tan, recipient of the Cultural Medallion in 2014. Besides staging its own shows, TNS has worked with youths and seniors to nurture new talents and local content.

Project URL:
www.necessary.org/index.php/outreach/theatre-for-seniors

Community Drumming Network

Community Drumming Network (CDN) is committed to promoting the benefits of community drumming through organising drumming activities and performances for the community. Through such exposure and hands-on activities, *CDN* hopes to influence the community to become active participants in community drumming. The *CDN* Management Committee currently comprises the leaders of Drum Circles in Ayer Rajah, Clementi, Eunos, Hougang, Jalan Kayu, Kaki Bukit, Kallang CC, Kampong Glam, Kolam Ayer, Queenstown and Yuhua.
www.facebook.com/community.drumming

Open Homes

Theatre Today is a creative platform that celebrates and presents socially relevant theatre. It was set up in 2016 by experienced theatre director and drama educator Jeffrey Tan. Through workshops, productions or specially commissioned projects, Theatre Today advocates the participation and engagement of the audience to co-create the final theatre experience.
https://theatretodaysg.com

Sounding Motion

anGie seah's multidisciplinary practice explores human nature in relation to the social environment, through encounters with sound. Her work traverses the domains of drawing, sculpture, performance and installation, giving form to shapeless aural experiences. Spontaneity is a key artistic strategy for anGie, allowing chance and intuition to navigate shifting emotional resonances and psychological states.
www.angieseah.com

Zai Tang's work focuses on the evolving relationship between sound, space and the body in real and imagined environments. Drawing from research in acoustic ecology, psychogeography, experimental music and synaesthesia, his work engages the audience through the act of listening. Through this he hopes to reveal how sound can enrich our experience of place and contribute to more dynamic states of being.
www.zaitang.com

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About the National Arts Council

The National Arts Council champions the arts in Singapore. By nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement, our diverse and distinctive arts inspire our people, connect communities and profile Singapore internationally. We preserve our rich, cultural traditions as we cultivate accomplished artists and vibrant companies for the future. Our support for the arts is comprehensive – from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing. The Council welcomes greater private and corporate giving to and through the arts so that together we can make the arts an integral part of everyone's lives. For more information on the Council's mission and plans, visit www.nac.gov.sg.

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